

Two Poets of the Peasantry

31

scholarship to be a clerical forgery, had been
a root fertile
of all evil:

Whan Costantyn of curtesye • holykirke dowed
With londes and ledes (tenements) • lordeshipes and
rentes,
An angel men herde an heigh • at Rome crye,
'*Dos ecclesie* (the dower of the Church) this day -
hath ydronke
venym,

And tho (those) that han Petres powere • arn
apoysoned alle.'
He does not merely predict, he frankly
advocates, con-
fiscation. 'Take their lands, ye lords', he
cries boldly;
'why should lords give lands away from their
heirs to
religious bodies that do not care though it
rains on their
altars?' And there were already precedents
as the four-
teenth century opened; the Templars, that
mysterious
body recalling at once the Foreign Legion
and the Free-
masons, had been stripped bare and
stamped out, for
little reason, it appears, except their
enormous wealth.
Kings of France and even the Free Companies
had squeezed
the Holy Father himself at Avignon, as if he
were a Jew.
And the leaders of the Peasants' Revolt of
1381 will, like
Wiclif, include disendowment among their
demands.

The Age of Faith is dying, slowly but
inevitably. Louis XI
in the next century can still offer Boulogne to
the Blessed
Virgin; but he will keep its revenues for
himself. And yet
so snail-like is the pace of History that the
process, fatal
to the religious orders of England only two
centuries after
this, to those of Spain only yesterday, to those

of Ireland
not till tomorrow, first began to ferment
seven centuries
ago. Montesquieu once gave Christianity
another five
hundred years. It was wise of him, whether
he proves
right or not, to be so much more patient
than most
prophets, 'Le peuple', as he says elsewhere,
'a toujours
trop d'action ou trop peu. Quelquefois avec
cent mille
bras il renverse tout; quelquefois avec cent
mille pieds il
ne va que comme les insectes/